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REAGAN WELCOMES SOVIET PROPOSALS ON ARMS CUTBACKS

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 28 — President Reagan today welcomed new Soviet arms proposals that reportedly call for 50 percent cuts in the offensive nuclear arsenals of the two superpowers. He said the United States was "ready for tough but fair" negotiations.

At the same time, Mr. Reagan expressed the hope that the arms talks "will be free of preconditions and other obstacles to progress."

In a generally optimistic assessment of his three hours of talks on Friday with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Reagan said that despite fundamental differences between the United States and the Soviet Union, "progress can be made" in negotiations in Geneva on nuclear and space weapons.

"There is no reason why real reductions cannot begin promptly," he said in his weekly radio speech.

The Soviet Union is expected to detail its new arms proposals in Geneva this week. At the White House meeting on Friday, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard A. Shevardnadze, gave Mr. Reagan a letter from the Soviet leader, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, and outlined the arms proposals.

Link to 'Star Wars' Program

Administration officials said the proposals called for 50 percent reductions in the strategic nuclear arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union and a halt in American work to develop a space-based defense shield against incoming nuclear missiles. Mr. Reagan has rejected use of the space defense plan, popularly called "Star Wars," as a bargaining chip.

In his address today, Mr. Reagan said: "Mr. Shevardnadze indicated that Soviet negotiators will present a counterproposal in Geneva to the initiative that we have taken there. We welcome this.

"It is important," the President said, "that the counterproposal address our concerns about reductions and stability, just as we have sought to address Soviet concerns."

Mr. Reagan added, "We're ready for tough but fair negotiating."

The new Soviet plan is the first con-

crete measure offered by Moscow to reduce offensive arms since the Geneva talks resumed in March, and it is plainly viewed by Administration officials as a serious bargaining position. For months, the United States has attributed the deadlock in Geneva to a Soviet failure to make a serious counterproposal to arms reduction plans offered by the United States.

Moreover, the disclosure of the Soviet plan underscored what Administration officials have been saying: that arms control is emerging as the central issue at the meeting in Geneva between Mr. Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev on Nov. 19 and 20.

Mr. Reagan said that in his session with the Soviet Foreign Minister, he had offered "some new ideas" as well as "plans and expectations" for the summit meeting.

He did not disclose details.

Nonetheless, Mr. Reagan emphasized that he wanted to negotiate arms reductions and was eager to show his commitment to do so.

'A Long-Term Process'

"What we are engaged in," he said, "is a long-term process to solve problems which are solvable, bridge differences where they can be bridged and recognize those areas where there are no realistic solutions — and where they are lacking, managing our differences in a way that protects Western freedoms and preserves the peace.

"The United States stands ready to accomplish this," he added. "Much more must be done, but the process is under way. With equal determination by the Soviets, progress can be made."

Mr. Reagan said his meeting with Mr. Shevardnadze covered four major areas — human rights, regional problems, bilateral issues, and security and arms control matters. Officials have said these issues will be the basis for the summit meeting's agenda.

The President indicated that any improvement in American-Soviet relations would depend on the Soviet response on the issues. "We will judge the results as Soviet actions unfold in each of the four key areas of our relations," Mr. Reagan said.

Caution on Meeting's Results

Discussing the summit meeting, Mr. Reagan said: "Let's be clear that success will not come from one meeting. It must come from a genuine, long-term effort by the leadership of the Soviet Union as well as ourselves. The differences between us are, fundamentally, political systems, values and ideology, as well as in the way we conduct our relations with other countries."

Mr. Reagan said he had told the Soviet Foreign Minister of "the need for the Soviet Union to work with us seriously to reduce offensive nuclear arms," adding, "These weapons exist today, and there is no reason why real reductions cannot begin promptly."

An Administration official quoted Mr. Shevardnadze as saying that according to Moscow's figures, the United States has 12,000 nuclear charges and would be left with 6,000 under the Soviet reduction proposals. The total would include missile warheads, air-launched cruise missiles, bombs on aircraft, and short-range aerial attack missiles. The Soviet total is thought to be about 9,900.

According to the official, Mr. Shevardnadze suggested that after the two sides cut their offensive nuclear arsenals by 50 percent, they should then move to an equal total, but he did not specify how they would do so.